

CHAPTER NINE



Don't Waste the Grace You've Been Given

READ: EZRA CHAPTER 9 AND EPHESIANS CHAPTER 4:17-32

We've all heard it said, "How could it be sin if it's not hurting anybody?" or "How could it be wrong, if no one gets hurt?"

The internet is full of these questions, perhaps you've entertained the idea yourself. After all, how bad can it be if no one gets hurt?

Turning to Ezra chapter nine we read, "The people of Israel, including the priests and the Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the neighboring peoples with their detestable practices, like those of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians and Amorites..."

Reading on we see that Ezra is grieved for his people who have not only mingled with strangers from other lands, many had intermarried which was strictly forbidden in Jewish law.

DON'T RETURN TO YOUR SIN

In order to gain a deeper understanding of this, let's look at this verse from Deuteronomy Chapter 7.

And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them: Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. (Deuteronomy 7:2-3, KJV)

This commandment was given to them before they entered The Promised Land. It was symbolic, of life in the Spirit and those who return to their sin. There's a strong parallel here to the admonition given to us that we must leave sin behind as we enter the Spirit-filled life. We find it sprinkled throughout the New Testament, but here's one verse that sums it up well:

And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. (Galatians 5:24, KJV)

Once you are free from sin, don't return to it. Don't entertain it. Don't engage with it. Don't be married to it in the sense that you carry it into your new life with Christ. Destroy it.

≡ DID YOU KNOW ≡

In those days, houses didn't really have cupboards or storage closets as we think of them. Things were stored on pegs set up all around the room. If something was on its peg, it was safe and secure, stored properly and ready for use at the appropriate time. (David Guzik)

DON'T FEED YOUR SIN

There's an old Cherokee legend about two wolves at war, which serves to remind us how dangerous it is to entertain sin.

It goes on to say that one night a grandfather was teaching his grandson about life.

"A fight is going on inside me," he said to the boy. "It is a terrible fight between two wolves. One is evil: anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, and false pride." He continued, "The other is good: joy, peace, love, hope, humility, kindness, compassion, and faith. The same fight is going on inside you, and inside every other person you know."

The boy paused to think for a moment before looking up at his grandfather. "Which one will win?" He asked.

The wise man simply replied, "It's the one that you feed."

When we crucify our sin, we no longer feed that sin. We don't entertain it, meditate on it, or engage with it.

Those who are in Christ delight in His law. We meditate on His Word, we obey the Word, and we feed our minds with His goodness and truth.

That's how we crucify the flesh and win the good fight.

≡ DID YOU KNOW ≡

Out of perhaps 2-3 million Jews living in Babylon, only about 50,000 of them returned to Judea when they were set free. The first group came up with Zerubbabel and the second group came with Ezra.

SALVATION STARTS HERE AND NOW

Don't waste the grace you've been given. Don't treasure the sin that you're in. God's plan for your life isn't far off in the future, it's a plan that

Leave Your Sin in the Past

starts here and now. It's a life of abundant joy and incomparable peace. Why put that off for tomorrow when you can be blessed today?

Satan comes to kill, to steal, and destroy, but he can't touch this treasure inside. He'll try, I assure you of that, which is why it's important that we're walking in faith. He can't steal your joy if it's rooted in Christ. He can't rob you of peace if you're grounded in faith.

And so, my friend, salvation is more than simply a ticket to heaven someday, it's a relationship with God, that starts right here and right now.

LIKE THE HOLY SPIRIT, EZRA GRIEVES OVER SIN

When you truly love God, it's not hard to see why The Holy Spirit is grieved. Grieved by the sin we return to. Grieved each time we try to minimize sin. Grieved by the sin that sent our Lord to the Cross.

Remember, Ezra is a type of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, which means that he typifies or reflects the character of the Holy Spirit. As we look at this chapter we see Ezra grieving over the sin of his people, which offers us another parallel to the spiritual life: one in which the Holy Spirit grieves over sin. We see him interceding on behalf of God's people in much the same way that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us today.

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8:26-27, KJV)

The Jews were God's chosen people. They were the ones entrusted with the Words of God, but with that that blessing came responsibility. They were given strict laws to adhere to so that they might be an example for us and for the ages to come.

Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. (1 Corinthians 10:11, KJV)

≡ DID YOU KNOW ≡

Intermarriage wasn't so much an ethnic problem as it was a sin problem to the Jews. Notice how verse one points out their "abominations" or as the NIV translates it, "detestable practices."

THE DESTRUCTIVE POTENTIAL OF SIN

When we gave our lives over to Christ, we left sin behind. At least we should have, if we love God the way we say that we do.

And yet I wonder, how many of those little sins are we still hanging onto? The ones we don't see as destructive, the ones we've decided can stay.

Maybe it's a bad temper. Maybe it's a habit of swearing. Maybe you're getting drunk on Saturday nights. Maybe you know it's there, but you've decided this sin is harmless enough to remain a part of your life. Maybe you're not ready to let go just yet.

Remember the scripture that says, "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." What we deem as harmless has the potential to destroy us in ways we could never imagine.

My friend, don't underestimate the destructive potential of sin. Don't fool yourself into thinking that a little sin is harmless. Don't trade the power of God's wisdom for the folly of your own. Don't choose comfort in lieu of courage.



*A little leaven leaveneth
the whole lump...*

What was the accusation raised against the people of Israel including the priest and the Levites?

Who led the way (or who was chief) in this unfaithfulness?

What was intermarriage with these other people symbolic of?

Was intermarriage the only problem they had?

What did Ezra do when he heard about the sinful accusations?

What does the Jewish word “Kriah” mean, and what is it symbolic of?

What does Romans 12:2 tell us about separating ourselves from the world?
Write the verse out here.

What does 2 Corinthians 6:14 teach us about separating ourselves from the world? Write the verse out here.

When Ezra grieved over the sin of the people, he typified the Holy Spirit who grieves when we sin. What are some things that grieve the Holy Spirit?
See Ephesians 4:25-32, and list them in your own words:

And when He is come, He will
reprove the world concerning sin,
and concerning righteousness, and
concerning judgment:

John 16:8



CHAPTER TEN



It Only Takes a Spark

READ: EZRA CHAPTER 10 AND ACTS CHAPTER 2

I got something pretty today. I'm easy to please when it comes to pretty things, and this new range hood is just that. It makes me look and feel like a real cook even when I'm just opening a can.

Before the installer got to work on our kitchen, my husband threw down a few bed sheets to shield the stove and counter top from falling dust and debris, then the installer set up a ladder in front of the oven and got to work.

You know how it is--they work, they run to the truck for a tool, they come back... Well on one of his trips back into the house I heard the word, "Fire!"

Here's the thing about our new stove--if you happen to lean on it you might turn it on, and that's exactly what happened. The element was on, his measuring tape was melting, and our sheet was on fire! Thankfully we caught it in time, as I'm sure you know fire can spread quickly.

THE POWER OF A SPARK

As I got to thinking about that today I was reminded of the power of a little spark. Just as one spark can set a forest on fire, so our testimony can ignite faith in the heart of another.

There's an old camp song we used to sing in the 70s called "Pass it On." I haven't thought about that song for years, but today it's been on my heart. Here's one of the verses from it...

I wish for you my friend
This happiness that I've found
You can depend on Him
It matters not where you're bound
I'll shout it from the mountain top
I want the world to know
The Lord of love has come to me
I want to pass it on
– Kurt Kaiser

My sister Bonnie and I used to sing that song all the time on road trips. We'd be in the back seat of the car belting out church tunes, with that one at the top of our list every time.

≡ DID YOU KNOW ≡

According to Levitical Law, a guilt offering (verse 19) was different from that of a sin offering. According to Leviticus 6:4, the offender was required to make full restitution by returning anything that was taken, entrusted to him, or found, plus a fifth of the value. (All things considered, it's likely that their wives were given some sort of alimony when they were sent away.) In addition to this, they had to bring a ram without defect to the Lord. The ram was presented to the priest who would make atonement for their sin.

THE POWER OF ONE

I've held onto those lyrics over the years as a constant reminder of the power of one. All it takes is one person willing to be used by the Lord, one faithful servant of God.

- One man building an ark.
- One shepherd boy slaying a giant.
- One man willing to speak to the Pharaoh.
- One woman hiding the spies.
- One man who believed in God's promise.
- One woman willing to speak to the king on behalf of her people.

Opening my Bible to Ezra chapter 10, I see one man praying, confessing, weeping and throwing himself down before the house of God. One spark, that got a fire going.

The Bible tells us that while Ezra was praying, a large crowd gathered around him and wept bitterly.

What simply started with one man and one prayer, turned into one of the greatest revivals in history, as person after person turned away from their sin, and turned their lives toward God.

And so, my friend, don't underestimate the power of one. One willing servant ready to be used. One powerful God behind her.

One Faithful Servant of God

≡ DID YOU KNOW ≡

Notice how the word “covenant” (verse three) and the word “oath” (verse five) are different. To make an oath is to give your word or promise to do something.

A covenant, however, comes from a root word which means to cut, thus the animal sacrifices were severed. Circumcision was a symbol of God’s covenant with the Jews. Christians today keep the new covenant by cutting off sin and walking in truth.

THE FIRE TRIANGLE

Fire needs three things to exist: fuel, oxygen, and heat. This is known as “The Fire Triangle.” Take away any one of these things and that fire is immediately extinguished. You may have seen this happen when you cover a candle. Take away the oxygen, and the fire goes out. The fire will also go out if you run out of wood or try to start it without heat.

What you’re seeing in this last chapter are the three working together to create a blazing fire. It’s similar to what we see in Acts Chapter 2, when the Holy Spirit filled the house like a rushing wind. The heat source in both of these instances was prayer, the fuel were the people and the oxygen—The Holy Spirit.

Acts chapter 1:14 says,

These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren. (Acts 1:14, KJV)

Ezra 10:1 says,

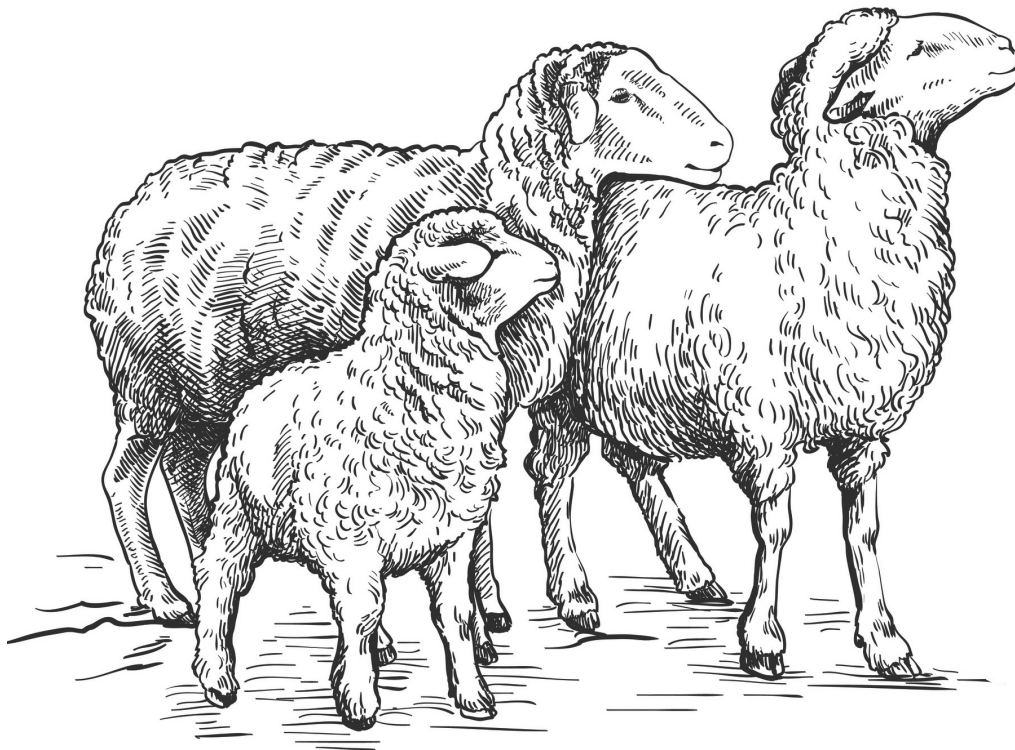
While Ezra was praying and confessing, weeping and throwing himself down before the house of God, a large crowd of Israelites—men, women and children—gathered around him. They too wept bitterly.

Ezra’s prayer was deeply convicting. And, so it is with the power of the Holy Spirit as it convicts the world of sin. As we allow the Holy Spirit to move in our lives He continues to fan the flame and keep the fire going.

Notice how the people gathered around Ezra, like logs on a fire, waiting for that one spark to ignite. Once it did, that fire spread throughout the camp until the whole assembly responded to the call for repentance. They put away their foreign wives, which again represents that marriage to sin we all once had, and made a firm decision to serve the Lord.

What did Shechaniah suggest to Ezra, and what does this tell us about Shechaniah's attitude at this time?

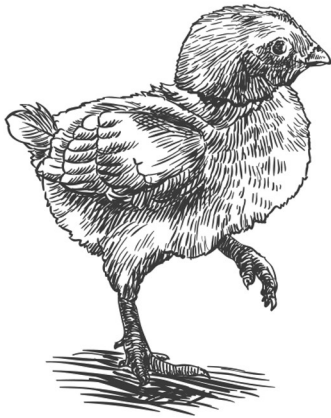
Using Shechaniah's example, what three steps should we take when we find ourselves caught up in sin?



The events we read about in this chapter are not an invitation to divorce an unbelieving spouse. In fact, the Bible tells us that God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16). These Jews were under the Levitical Law. As such, their example serves to teach us a spiritual lesson. Looking to 1 Corinthians Chapter 7, what reason does Paul give the church for staying with an unbelieving spouse?

What proclamation was issued throughout Judah?
And what did Ezra do right before the proclamation was issued?

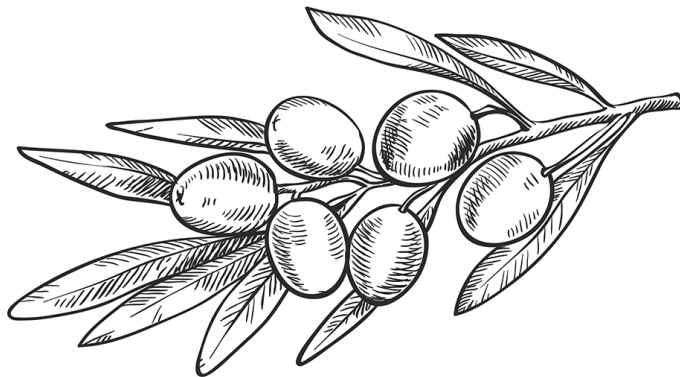
When the people were assembled together, what were they told to do?
And what was their response?



In the introduction I pointed out that the book of Ezra parallels the purification of one's heart. Looking back at that chapter, what was the definition of the word purify?

In what way were hearts purified in this chapter?

Finally, looking back at Jeremiah 24:6-7 again, let's remember once again why God brought them through this journey and to this final place. Write the verse out here:





ANSWER KEY

INTRODUCTION:

1. What did Nebuchadnezzar do to Jehoiakim (Eliakim)?
Nebuchadnezzar attacked him and carried him off to Babylon along with articles from the temple that he kept for himself.
2. What do we know about the Jewish people during the reign of Zedekiah?
All the leaders of the priests and the people became more and more unfaithful, following all the detestable practices of the nations and defiling the temple of the Lord.
3. How did they react when God sent messengers to them?
They mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets.
4. What was God's response to their actions? (v. 17)
He gave them into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, who mercilessly attacked the men, women, and the elderly with the sword.
5. What did Nebuchadnezzar's men destroy, and what did they take away?
They set fire to the temple, they broke the wall in Jerusalem, burned the palaces, and destroyed anything of value there. They took all the articles from the temple and the treasures of the king and his officials to Babylon.
6. What is the definition of purify?
To make pure; free from anything that debases, pollutes, adulterates, or contaminates, or to free from foreign, extraneous, or objectionable elements. (Dictionary.com)
7. What happened to the remnant of Israelites that survived the massacre?
Anyone who escaped the brutal attack was taken into captivity and made to serve the king.

8. Read Jeremiah 24:6-7. Write verse 7 out here:
And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the Lord: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart.
9. Look up the definition of the word “heart”. Which definition do you think applies to that verse in Jeremiah Chapter 24?
The center of emotion, especially as contrasted to the head as the center of the intellect.
10. Have you ever felt that God has allowed you to go through a trial in order to purify you?
If so, what happened and how did you grow from it?
This answer will be different for everyone.

CHAPTER 1

1. Ezra 1:1 refers to the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy. What was that prophecy? (See Jeremiah 29:10)
For thus saith the Lord, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place.
2. What mission did God appoint to Cyrus?
To rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem which is in Judah.
3. How did the neighbors (the Jews who stayed behind) assist the Israelites in their return?
They gave them silver, gold, goods, beasts, and the freewill offering for the house of God.
4. How many articles of gold and silver did Sheshbazzar, The Prince of Judah, bring back to Jerusalem?
5,400 articles of gold and of silver.
5. Look up Sheshbazzar (Hebrew name Zerubbabel) using an online resource like Wikipedia. List three things you find out about him:
He was the grandson of Jeconiah, King of Judah.
He led the first group of Jews, numbering 42,360.
He is always associated with Joshua the High Priest.
6. In the proclamation made by King Cyrus, who did he say could go to Jerusalem to build the temple?
Any of God’s people.

7. In Isaiah 45:1, what does God refer to Cyrus as?
His anointed.
8. Have you ever been used by God in ways you wouldn't have imagined? Or placed in an unexpected position of ministry? Explain one that stands out.
This answer will be different for everyone.

CHAPTER 2

1. What does 1 Peter 2:9 say? Write the verse out here.
But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. (1 Peter 2:9, KJV)
2. What warning does Jesus give us in regard to communion in 1 Corinthians 11?
Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. (1 Corinthians 11:27, KJV)
3. As royal priests, what are some ways that we can offer sacrifices to the Lord? Or, perhaps another way to word this might be, what are some things we might surrender to the Lord?
This answer will be different for everyone. Some answers might be:
Our lives.
Our tempers.
Our bad habits.
Our time.
Our money.
Our sinful past.
4. What should we do before we come to the communion table? See Matthew 5:23-24 and 1 Corinthians 11:27.
We need to examine our hearts to see if we have any unrepented sin that we need to get right with God. We also need to forgive those who have trespassed against us and do our part to make things right with other people.
5. How many people returned from exile (including the slaves and the singers) in this chapter?
49,897

6. How many of them were Levites?

74

7. Stop for a minute to examine your heart. Is there anything that you need to change in your life? Is there anything that you need to get right with God?

This answer will be different for everyone.

8. Is there anyone in your life that you haven't forgiven? Is there anyone that you are having an issue with? If so, what can you do to reconcile this?

This answer will be different for everyone.

CHAPTER 3

1. According to Leviticus 23, what took place on the 15th day of the 7th month?

They celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles for 7 days.

2. What are two other names for the Feast of Tabernacles?

Booths, Ingathering

3. What did Haggai prophesy in Haggai 2:9? And why do you think he made that claim?

"The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house," says the LORD Almighty. "And in this place, I will grant peace," declares the LORD Almighty. Because Jesus Himself would enter the temple.

4. Who were the two men that began the building of the altar?

Joshua and Zerubbabel

5. When did they start building the temple?

In the second month of the second year.

6. What did they do during that week-long celebration, and why?

They were to dwell in booths for seven days in remembrance of the children of Israel who dwelled in booths for 40 years in the wilderness, when God brought them out of the land of Egypt.

7. Verse 2 says that they built the altar as it was written in the law of Moses. How large was the altar that Moses built (in feet)? See Exodus 27:1.

Seven and a half feet square and four and a half feet high.

8. They used cedar logs to build the temple. How did they get them?
They came by sea from Lebanon to Joppa, as authorized by Cyrus king of Persia.
9. What encouragement would you give someone who wants to make God a priority in their life?
This answer will be different for everyone.
10. What kind of things distract you from making God your first priority?
This answer will be different for everyone.

CHAPTER 4

1. This chapter starts out by telling us that Judah's adversaries approached them and offered to help. As we see in verse ten, these people were Samaritans. Throughout scripture, the Samaritans and the Jews were at odds with each other. Who was the founder of Samaria? And how did that come about? See 1 Kings 16:21-28.
After the Israelites split into two groups, Omri, king of Israel, bought the hill of Samaria from Shemer for two talents (about 150 pounds) of silver. He built a city on the hill, calling it Samaria, after Shemer, the name of the former owner of the hill.
2. Did they really seek God the way that the Israelites did? Or was that a lie? What does 2 Kings 17:33 tell us?
They feared God but continued serving their false gods as well.
3. How did the enemy get the officials to work against the people of Judah?
They bribed them.
4. What does 2 Kings 17:24 tell us about this group of people from Samaria? How did they arrive there?
The king of Assyria brought them from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof.
5. What are two of the accusations made against the people of Judah found in verse 15?
They were a rebellious city
They were troublesome to kings

6. What happened after the king's letter was read to Rehum and Shimshai?
They were forced to stop their work.
7. Have you ever felt guilty for something you have done in the past even though you know that God has forgiven you for it?
This answer will be different for everyone.
8. What Bible verses (find 2) could you share with someone who is struggling to let go of guilt and accept God's forgiveness?
This answer will be different for everyone.

CHAPTER 5

1. According to verse 5, why couldn't the enemy stop the men from working?
Because God was watching over them.
2. When the men asked for the workers names, what names did they give them?
The servants of the God of heaven and earth.
3. Who were the men that questioned Zerubbabel and Joshua?
Tatnai, Shetharboznai and their companions.
4. What was the name of the king that they sent a letter to?
Darius.
5. According to Haggai 1:1, when was Haggai's prophecy to these men? (Compare this with Ezra 4:24)
In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month.
6. What does Haggai 2:9 say? Write the verse out here:
The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,' says the Lord Almighty. 'And in this place, I will grant peace,' declares the Lord Almighty."
7. Do you remember that verse from an earlier chapter? Why do you think God said that?
Because Jesus Himself would visit that temple.
8. Can you think of a particular time when someone comforted, encouraged, or strengthened you with their words? What did they say that strengthened you?
This answer will be different for everyone.

9. What does the Bible say about edifying or comforting others? Find two verses and write them out here:
This answer will be different for everyone.

CHAPTER 6

1. What does Romans 3:23 say about sin?
For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.
2. What temple was Jesus talking about in John 2:19-21?
He was talking about the resurrection of His body from the dead.
3. Where was the money coming from for the rebuilding of the temple?
The king's treasury.
4. The New Testament talks about believers being the temple of the Holy Ghost. What is the foundation we are built on, and what part of the building does Jesus represent?
See Ephesians 2:20-22.
We are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Jesus is the chief cornerstone.
5. What is a cornerstone, and why is this stone so important?
The cornerstone (or foundation stone or setting stone) is the first stone set in the construction of a masonry foundation. It's important because all other stones are set in reference to this stone, thus determining the position of the entire structure. (Wikipedia, Cornerstone)
6. How were the men that went to the king in this chapter different from the ones we read about in Chapter 4?
The men we read about in Chapter 4 didn't want to know the truth, all they wanted to do was deceive the king in hopes of destroying the temple. The group we read about in this chapter wanted to inform the king and settle the matter.
7. What words of encouragement could you give someone who is struggling to let go of guilt?
This answer will be different for everyone.

8. How do we render Satan's accusations useless?
By repenting and giving glory to God. The more we're accused the more we have to be thankful for.
9. What are some of the lies and accusations that Satan tells you (or has told you) about yourself? Have they immobilized you in any way?
This answer will be different for everyone.
10. What was the Law of Medes and Persians?
That no decree nor statute which the king establisheth may be changed.

CHAPTER 7

1. When did Ezra arrive in Jerusalem, and when did he leave Babylon?
He left on the first day of the first month and arrived on the first day of the fifth month.
2. How many times does this chapter mention the hand of God being on Ezra?
Three.
3. Verse six tells us that Ezra was a scribe. What is a scribe?
A person who serves as a professional copyist, especially one who made copies of manuscripts before the invention of printing. (Dictionary.com)
4. What three things did Ezra prepare his heart to do?
To seek God's law.
To do God's law.
To teach God's law.
5. We see Ezra's lineage listed in this chapter. How far back does it go, and what does this tell us about him?
It goes back to Aaron the brother of Moses. It tells us that Ezra was from the line of priests.
6. What do you think "the hand of God was upon Ezra" means?
This answer might be slightly different for everyone, but it basically means that God's approval and divine intervention was with him.

7. In what ways do you see the intervention of God at work in this chapter?
This answer will be different for everyone.
8. Have you ever felt like the hand of God was upon you in a certain circumstance? If so, explain.
This answer will be different for everyone.

CHAPTER 8

1. Why do you think it was important for there to be some Levites among the people?
Because the Levites were the only ones designated by God to serve in the Temple.
2. How many men did Ezra send to Iddo, the chief, at Casiphia?
Eleven
3. How many Levites came back with them, and how many temple servants?
38 Levites and 220 Temple Servants
4. What was the purpose of the fast before the journey?
To humble themselves before God and pray for a safe journey.
5. Why was Ezra ashamed to ask the king for help?
Because he told the king that God would look after them. Asking for help would appear as though he lacked faith.
6. Ezra gave the 12 leading priests a commandment along with the articles that were weighed out to them. What was it?
Watch ye, and keep them, until ye weigh them before the chief of the priests and the Levites, and chief of the fathers of Israel, at Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the Lord.
7. What spiritual lesson does this commandment parallel, if any?
He equipped them with gifts in the same way that the Holy Spirit equips you and I. The gifts that we're given are a free-will offering to God to be used for His glory and honor until that day when we stand before the Judgement Seat of Christ to give account of these gifts we've been given.

8. How far did Ezra travel and approximately how many men went with him from Babylon to Jerusalem?

Travelling 900 miles, He led approximately 1800 men, from Babylon to Jerusalem.

9. What are some of the gifts that God has entrusted into your care, and how are you using them for his glory?

This answer will be different for everyone.

CHAPTER 9

1. What was the accusation raised against the people of Israel including the priest and the Levites?

They had not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations.

2. Who led the way (or who was chief) in this unfaithfulness?

The leaders and the officials.

3. What was intermarriage with these other people symbolic of?

A believer returning to sin.

4. Was intermarriage the only problem they had?

No. They were also engaging in the sinful lifestyle and detestable practices of their neighbors.

5. What did Ezra do when he heard about the sinful accusations?

He tore his garment and his robe, and plucked out some of his hair and beard, and sat down astonished.

6. What does the Jewish word “Kriah” mean, and what is it symbolic of?

The word “kriah” means tearing. It’s a tradition of rending garments that represents the tear in your heart.

7. What does Romans 12:2 tell us about separating ourselves from the world? Write the verse out here.

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

8. What does 2 Corinthians 6:14 teach us about separating ourselves from the world? Write the verse out here.

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?

Note: It's not saying that we can't be friends with people outside of our faith, but that we shouldn't be intimately united with them. While this is particularly important when choosing a spouse, it's also telling us not to walk in lock-step with the world.

9. When Ezra grieved over the sin of the people, he typified the Holy Spirit who grieves when we sin. What are some things that grieve the Holy Spirit? See Ephesians 4:25-32, and list them in your own words:

Lying

Sinful anger

Stealing

Unwholesome talk

Bitterness

Wrath

Anger

Fighting

Slander

Gossip

10. Are you still engaged with any sin from your past? Is there sin in your life that you haven't completely let go of? If so, what is it and what should you be doing about it?
This answer will be different for everyone.

CHAPTER 10

1. What did Shechaniah suggest to Ezra, and what does this tell us about Shechaniah's attitude at this time?

He said, "Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law."

His readiness to turn away from sin illustrates his repentance.

2. Using Shechaniah's example, what three steps should we take when we find ourselves caught up in sin?
 Confess our sin.
 Repent of our sin by turning away from it.
 Restore a right relationship with God by living according to His law.

3. What hope could you give someone who has backslidden and wonders if they can return to the Lord?
 This answer will be different for everyone. If you have trouble answering this one, remember these two verses:
 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: (Romans 3:23-24, KJV)
 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9, KJV)
 In addition to these verses, The Parable of the Prodigal Son (in Luke Chapter 15) is a beautiful reminder of God's love and incomparable grace.

4. The events we read about in this chapter are not an invitation to divorce an unbelieving spouse. In fact, the Bible tells us that God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16). These Jews were under the Levitical Law. As such, their example serves to teach us a spiritual lesson. Looking to 1 Corinthians Chapter 7, what reason does Paul give the church for staying with an unbelieving spouse?
 In verse 16 Paul points out how we don't know if staying with them might lead to their salvation.

5. What proclamation was issued throughout Judah? And what did Ezra do right before the proclamation was issued?
 For all the exiles to assemble in Jerusalem. Anyone who failed to appear within three days would forfeit all his property.
 Before the proclamation was sent, Ezra fasted and mourned.

6. When the people were assembled together, what were they told to do? And what was their response?
 To make confession unto the Lord, to do his will, and to separate themselves from the people of the land, including their strange wives.
 Then all the congregation answered and said with a loud voice, "As thou hast said, so must we do."

7. In the introduction I pointed out that the book of Ezra parallels the purification of one's heart. Looking back at that chapter, what was the definition of the word purify?
According to Dictionary.com, the word purify means, "To make pure; free from anything that debases, pollutes, adulterates, or contaminates, or to free from foreign, extraneous, or objectionable elements."

8. In what way were hearts purified in this chapter?
They separated themselves from their foreign relationships and sinful practices that polluted their faith.

9. Finally, looking back at Jeremiah 24:6-7 again, let's remember once again why God brought them through this journey and to this final place. Write the verse out here:
My eyes will watch over them for their good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up and not tear them down; I will plant them and not uproot them. I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart.